



Pershing II

Success Amid Chaos

Major George D. Livingston, Jr., United States Army

64th Airborne Division Headquarters and town, destroy all committed forces of the North Vietnamese, and render the first State Republic of Vietnam a free and independent nation.

This was the last of the operations of the 64th Airborne Division (less one regiment committed in another area) for the 1968 offensive in northeast Binh Dinh Province, Republic of Vietnam.

Pershing II—a major operation that happened to coincide with the enemy's preparation for the Tet offensive and his actual assault and aftermath—was conducted by a reinforced brigade task force made up of one mechanized and two airmobile infantry battalions of the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile). The

Pershing II

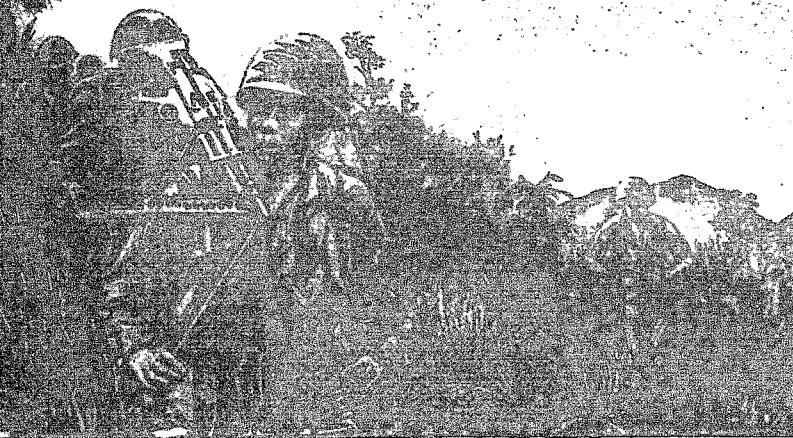
Success Amid Chaos

Major George D. Livingston, Jr., United States Army

My District Headquarters and town, destroy all communist forces, and render the 1st Army Republic of Vietnam combat-ready for the offensive.

This was the assignment to the 3d North Vietnamese Army Division (less one regiment committed in another area) for the enemy's Tet offensive in northeast Binh Dinh Province, Republic of Vietnam.

Pershing II—a daring operation that happened to coincide with the enemy preparation for the Tet offensive and his actual attack and aftermath—was conducted by a reinforced brigade task force made up of one mechanized and two airmobile infantry battalions of the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile). T



task force and its commander were familiar with the area, and close, continuous liaison had long been established with all Vietnamese military and political headquarters in the large area of responsibility.

By mid-January 1968, the closely coordinated and integrated intelligence system established by the task force and local Vietnamese commanders had determined from numerous sources the outlines and general timing of the enemy's immediate intentions in the *Pershing* air operation. However, there were few indications that the impending local offensive was to be part of a countrywide, coordinated enemy effort.

Intelligence Effort Increased

The task force commander, in close coordination with Vietnamese commanders and US advisors of the 41st and 42d ARVN Regiments, Vinh Thanh and Ha Tay Special Forces Camps, and Phu My, Hoa An, and Hoai Nhon Districts, ordered that an increased intelligence collection effort be directed at further refining his knowledge of the enemy's intentions.

Continuous communications were established between United States and Vietnamese headquarters. US battalions were told to be prepared for the relief of known and probable enemy

objectives; troops were redistributed in the area of operations to provide a higher density in the areas directly threatened; and patrolling by day and night was increased on the periphery of the government-controlled areas and between those areas and likely enemy forward bases. Agents were positioned, and casual informants were recruited along likely routes of enemy movement toward probable objectives. Units designated as reaction forces conducted actual reconnaissance and partial rehearsal for their counterattack plans.

Spoiling Operations

Fixed-wing and air cavalry reconnaissance were increased, especially in those areas which the enemy was likely to use as staging areas. These aerial scouts were particularly successful in detecting and engaging North Vietnamese Army liaison parties and command and reconnaissance elements. Many of the enemy dead from these contacts were confirmed to be commanders or political cadre.

Spoiling operations were stepped up in an attempt to keep the enemy off balance and to deny him the use of forward staging areas. Light to moderate contact, with highly successful results, was gained on numerous occasions, thereby forcing those engaged enemy units to disperse. Enemy stragglers were killed or captured, underlying the success of these spoiling attacks and the enemy's difficulty in reassembling.

Artillery and air interdiction were coordinated and integrated with all available means in range of the area of operations. Ammunition expenditures for interdiction were increased, and targets were selected by the brigade provisional targeting section in the most likely areas to be used by

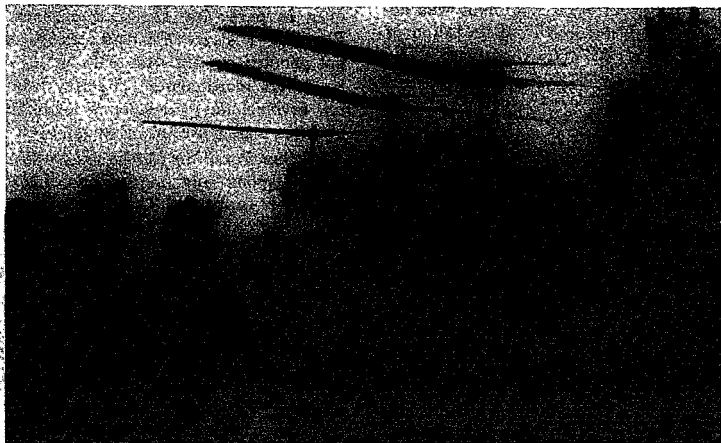
Major George D. Livingston, Jr., a graduate student at Auburn University, Alabama, received a B.S. in Economics from Florida State University, Tallahassee. He has had numerous staff and command assignments while serving with the 82d Airborne Division, the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam; with the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) in Vietnam; and with the US Army Combat Developments Command Infantry Agency, Fort Benning, Georgia.

the enemy for preparation of his impending attack.

Although weakened and partly disorganized by the spoiling operations and interdiction program, the enemy initiated his offensive by attacking a Popular Forces outpost just inside the pacified area of Phu My District. This

United States commanders of the relief forces. The ambushers were immediately attacked from the flank and rear. In the ensuing engagement, the enemy lost 143 killed and two North Vietnamese soldiers and 32 weapons captured.

Unsuccessful in their ambush at-



Army News Features

Air mobility was a large factor in keeping the enemy off balance and denying him use of forward staging areas

was the first of a series of attacks. Apparently, the enemy's main purpose in this instance was to ambush the relief force he was sure would be dispatched. He expected this column to be made up of ARVN infantry and Regional and Popular Forces. However, the decision by the US task force commander and the Vietnamese district chief was to reinforce the Vietnamese force with a mechanized rifle company.

A civilian halted the column as it was en route to the engaged outpost and pointed out the enemy ambush positions to the Vietnamese and

tempt, the enemy initiated a series of three apparently uncoordinated battalion-size attacks against Phu My District Headquarters and town. In the first attack, initiated by a Popular Force platoon reacting to an intelligence report from a casual informant, the enemy was stopped short of his objective and suffered 88 killed and 37 weapons and three soldiers captured by a combined United States-Vietnamese reaction force.

Three days later, reacting to an intelligence report that had been confirmed by a friendly civilian, a US mechanized rifle company late in the

day intercepted an enemy battalion. In a running engagement, the company killed 28 enemy and captured 26 weapons and 15 North Vietnamese soldiers. The next day, 88 of the withdrawing enemy force were killed.

In the enemy's last attack of their offensive, the remaining uncommitted battalion of the 2d Regiment was detected and engaged by a battalion of the 41st ARVN Regiment. The engaged government battalion was quickly reinforced by one US mechanized rifle company. The combined force attacked the entrenched enemy unit killing 90 and dispersing the remainder of the enemy battalion. In addition to these major engagements, there were numerous small contacts fought with telling results between independent and combined United States-Vietnamese forces and enemy units and small groups of stragglers attempting to withdraw to their base and rally areas.

In *Pershing II*, the attacking enemy was harassed during his preparation phase, engaged short of the objective of his attacks, held and defeated in place, and relentlessly pursued as the survivors attempted to escape. Three of the five major engagements were initiated by Regional and Popular Forces or ARVN infantry reacting to intelligence reports.

All battalions of the US task force contributed to the success by exploiting air mobility, effectively controlling their respective areas of responsibility, interdicting enemy routes of movement by ambushing enemy units and capturing stragglers, and providing reinforcing forces for engaged United States and Vietnamese units. However, the attached mechanized infantry battalion was a decisive factor in all five of the major engagements.

The results of the enemy's Tet offensive in the *Pershing II* area of operations were more than satisfactory for the allies. The enemy's 2d Regiment, used for his main effort, had all three organic battalions severely battered and was rendered combat ineffective while failing to accomplish, even in part, any assigned mission; Phu My District Headquarters was not penetrated; the 41st ARVN Regiment was more combat effective; and no revolutionary development team member was captured or killed.

During *Pershing II*, the enemy lost 230 weapons and more than 1,270 killed or captured. The 2d Brigade Task Force, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile), alone killed or captured 760 enemy and maintained a 29 to one kill ratio. Later, intelligence indicated that the committed enemy units lost 50 percent of all weapons, 80 percent of unit equipment, and nearly 100 percent of personal equipment.

The key to this clear-cut but unpublicized victory was a responsive and integrated intelligence system. This provided the needed early warning that permitted the harassment, weakening, and disorganizing of the enemy as he prepared for the offensive and the interception of maneuvering enemy units before they accomplished their assigned task. Relentless pursuit of withdrawing enemy survivors increased his losses and precluded his reorganization. A population loyal to the legal Vietnamese Government and the close coordination, cooperation, and respect built on mutual trust and understanding between the US task force and the Republic of Vietnam officials, commanders, soldiers, and citizens made this operation possible.